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When Spies Talk Shop

The new Director of Central Intelligence, Admiral Turner, has gone back into the woodwork of the CIA's headquarters in McLean, Va., and for the moment, all is quiet on the intelligence front. Our agents are undoubtedly agenting all over the world, infiltrating, "exfiltrating," being penetrated by the KGB, penetrating the KGB, and doing their clean and dirty work for the "national security." We take this moment of relative calm in the spy world to consider a couple of facets of the intelligence business.

They arise from two recently published books by former high officials of the CIA: *Secrets, Spies and Scholars* by Ray S. Cline, who was the agency's deputy director; and *The C.I.A.'s Secret Operations* by Harry Rositzke who held various important jobs in the agency, mainly in counterintelligence. (It was Mr. Rositzke who taught us the verb, "to exfiltrate.") Both works had, of course, to be cleared by the CIA, but nonetheless they are revealing. On and between the lines of them, the message is clear: the CIA is in a mess that is not entirely due to Congress' halfhearted attempt to peek under its curtains, and it will take time to straighten it out.

Naturally, both these intelligence veterans support the idea of an extensive U.S. intelligence apparatus, complete with "operational capability." That includes the ability to fiddle with friendly governments, overthrowing them if need be, to increase America's security "in a hostile world." Both Cline and Rositzke have reservations about how this has been done in the past, however, and they seem to agree that the CIA's cloak-and-dagger work has been extravagantly romanticized in Washington, leading to overstaffing and bureaucratization.

Cline writes that Presidents Johnson and Nixon greatly contributed to the corruption of the CIA by treating it "as an instrument for the execution of White House wishes by secret methods." He favors publication of the nation's expenditures on intelligence (a Constitutional requirement that has never been observed), on the ground that "the marginal value" the adversary would gain would be offset by an increase of "public confidence." He also calls the withholding of CIA information from Congress "ridiculous," which it is.

Rositzke's account of his quarter-century in the CIA makes it clear that those hidden budget figures are enormous. He puts a good deal of the blame for the bloated agency on the military's often hysterical demands for impossibly detailed information on Russian capability and intentions—the brass always thought Moscow was on the verge of going to war with us. He worries about the "strange and distasteful bedfellows" anti-communism has tucked in with us, but seems to have no qualms about spying on our more respectable friends to help corporations make money.

These two analytical memoirs by ex-agents unconsciously (if they'll pardon the term) tell a good deal about the American spy mentality. It is not altogether reassuring, for the message is that it will be a while at least before the "intelligence community" is under effective political control.